

Ephesians 1:1-14
The Architect of Salvation
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CALL TO WORSHIP

NKJ But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, (God's) own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. ...(Therefore) come to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious.

INVOCATION

O Lord, we praise You for Your Elect One, Jesus Christ, in whom Your soul delights. Though we are as weak as a bruised reed, He does not break us. Though we are as faint as smoking flax, He does not quench us.

Isaiah 42:1,3

We confess our sins, O Lord. You chose us that we should be holy and blameless in Christ. Forgive us, O Lord, for failing to live through faith in the power of Christ and for instead living contrary to our destiny in Christ.

Ephesians 1:4

We now pray, O Lord, for You to bless our worship service. Through our faith, we now come to Jesus as our living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by You, O God and precious. Through Him, O Lord, may we in our worship offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to You, the Lord our God.

1 Peter 2:4-5

BENEDICTION

NKJ Blessing and honor and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!

NKJ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.
Revelation 5:13b; 2 Corinthians 13:14

SERMON

The letter of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians begins with a long statement of praise to the Triune God of Scripture. In this statement, the Apostle Paul directs worship to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. These, of course, are the three Persons within the Godhead. The three Persons of the Godhead are an "I" and a "You" and a "He" within in the oneness of God such that they can love one another and communicate with one another and cooperate with one another. The Father, the Son and the Spirit are able to interact with each other in this way because they are personally distinct from each other. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit; the Son is not the Father or the Spirit; the Spirit is not the Father or the Son. Yet, at the same time, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are not separate individuals. They are not three gods. This is the mystery of the Trinity. God is one with a oneness infinitely more profound than the oneness we each experience in our own individual existences. At the same time, from all eternity God has experienced companionship that is infinitely more intimate than any companionship we will ever

know. God mysteriously combines ultimate oneness and ultimate love in a way beyond our ability to fully understand.

We looked at the wonder of the Trinity in my first sermon on this passage a couple of weeks ago. Today we want to go from there and begin looking at the role which each member of the Godhead plays in our salvation. Because of God's profound oneness, every member of the Godhead is involved in every aspect of our salvation. Yet because of the personal distinctions between the Father and the Son and the Spirit, each member of the Godhead plays a leading role in different aspects of our salvation. This hymn of praise praises each member of the Godhead for the distinctive role each plays in the work of salvation.

The hymn of praise begins praising the work of the first Person of the Godhead, the one whom we call God the Father. God the Father is here identified as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The first member of the Godhead has both of these relationships to Jesus. He is Jesus' God and He is Jesus' Father.

God the Father is Jesus' God especially in relation to Jesus' humanity. Let's remember exactly who Jesus is. The Person of God the Son took to Himself a true and complete human nature at the conception of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is the name given to this unique human individual. Jesus in His humanity looks to God the Father as His God.

God the Father is Jesus' Father especially in relation to Jesus' divinity. The relationship between God the Father and God the

Son is in some ways like the relationship between a human father and a human son. Now there are limits to this comparison because God the Father and God the Son are both fully divine. A human father always exists in time before his human son exists. That is not the case with God the Father and God the Son because God the Father and God the Son are both eternal. Neither of them ever had a beginning. Yet there is something about their relationship such that the Bible can say that the divine Son is the only begotten Son of the divine Father. There is some sense in which the divine Son is begotten of the divine Father without being created as a creature with a beginning in time. This is what the ancient creed is getting at when it says that the divine Son is begotten but not created and when it calls the divine Son very God of very God. Hebrews chapter one says that the divine Son is the express image of God the Father. As we would say, the son is a chip off the old block, or the acorn didn't fall very far from the tree. In His divine character, God the Son reflects and mirrors His divine Father.

So our passage identifies God the Father as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God the Father is Jesus' God especially in relation to Jesus' humanity, and God the Father is Jesus' Father especially in relation to Jesus' divinity.

Our passage then goes on to praise each member of the Godhead for that member's distinctive role in our salvation. To put it simply, God the Father administers salvation, God the Son achieves salvation, and God the Holy Spirit applies salvation.

We are going to look today at God the Father as the architect and administrator of our salvation. The section on the saving work of God the Father is easy to divide into three headings because there are three main verbs. In saving us, God blessed us, elected us and predestined us. We will look at each of these in order.

First, God the Father has blessed us. Our passage says that every spiritual blessing comes from God. As John the Baptist said in John 3:27, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven." And as James said, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). And as the Apostle Paul said, "By the grace of God, I am what I am, ..." (1 Corinthians 15:10) and "What do you have which you did not receive?" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Every truly good thing that we could possibly have ultimately comes from God.

Paul here refers to these blessings as spiritual blessings. Some take this to mean spiritual blessings as opposed to material blessings. In the Old Testament, God gave Israel land, and in the New Testament, God gives the church heaven. In the Old Testament, Jerusalem was an earthly city, and in the New Testament, the true Jerusalem is a heavenly city. There is some truth to this, but only as to emphasis. There were spiritual blessings as well as material blessings under the old covenant, and God still blesses us today in the material realm. One of our greatest blessings, the resurrection unto life on the last day, will be a blessing involving the material realm in a very significant way.

I don't believe Paul is here referring strictly to non-material blessings when he calls them spiritual blessings. The word "spiritual" can refer to something belonging to or something originating from the Holy Spirit. Let me read you a passage which uses the word "spiritual" in that sense:

1 Corinthians 2:13-14

- 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.
- 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Verse 13 refers to "spiritual things," and then verse 14 defines these as "the things of the Spirit of God." In this passage, "spiritual things" are things belonging to and originating from the Holy Spirit and not necessarily non-material things. I believe that is what Paul also means by spiritual blessing here in Ephesians chapter one. Every blessing which God showers down upon comes to us through the work of the Holy Spirit. God the Father plans blessings, God the Son earns blessings, and God the Spirit applies blessings.

Paul says that these blessings are in the heavenly places in Christ. This doesn't mean that we won't experience any of these blessings until we die and go to heaven. This is talking about the source of those blessings. There is this place called heaven. We sometimes call it the third heavens to distinguish it first from the earth's atmosphere or the sky, the place where birds fly, and

secondly from outer space, the realm of the sun, moon and stars. The third heavens is a place which God has created to manifest Himself with a special personal presence. Now God is everywhere, and wherever God is, all of God is there. You cannot find any place to hide from the presence of God. Read the 139th Psalm. Yet God can also manifest Himself anywhere in a special localized, personal presence. In this sense, God can be in the Holy of Holies of the old covenant temple or in the heart of the believer or on His throne in heaven. God created heaven as a place where He could manifest Himself in a special way, as a place where the heavenly hosts could worship Him, as a place where the souls of departed saints could await the resurrection of their bodies, and as a place where the resurrected Jesus could minister as the High Priest of the new covenant. This is the place where Christ went when He ascended into heaven forty days after His resurrection from the dead.

Heaven is the source of every spiritual blessing we receive because every blessing we receive is based on our being in covenant union with Christ, who is now in heaven. Jesus is the one who has earned our salvation through His life of perfect obedience, through the finished sacrifice of His death upon the cross and through His triumphant resurrection from the dead. God puts us into a covenant union with Jesus, and Jesus' work becomes our work. His death upon the cross becomes our payment for our sins, and His righteousness becomes our legal record before God. Jesus, who is now in heaven, is the source of our every blessing. We are in union with Him, and we consciously experience that union as faith, as trusting in Him alone and resting upon Him alone for our salvation.

God blessed us, and, our second point, God chose us or elected us. Now just about every professing Christian believes in the doctrine of election because the Bible so clearly teaches it here in this text. Paul here clearly says that God chose us. If we accept the Bible, we have to accept what Paul here says. Where people differ is why God chose whom He did. Why did God choose this person and not that person? That is the point of disagreement. Our position is that election was not some sort of spiritual beauty pageant. We don't believe that in eternity past, God looked ahead in time and said, "I see some spiritually beautiful people. They are the people of faith. I will choose them because they are spiritually beautiful." No, our position is that God chose us even though we were spiritually ugly, and that God chose us to make us into spiritually beautiful people. We call this unconditional election.

This concept of unconditional election is rooted in the Old Testament. God chose Abraham to be His special friend, and God chose Israel to be His holy nation. Now why did God choose Abraham and Israel? Was it because they deserved it? Or was it a choice of undeserved mercy? It was a choice of undeserved mercy. The same is true of the election we read about here in Ephesians chapter one. God chose the elect not because they were already holy and blameless but in order to make them holy and blameless. That is what the text clearly says. If election were a spiritual beauty pageant, the text would say that the Father chose us because we were holy and blameless. Instead the text says that the Father chose us so that we should be holy and blameless in Christ.

God chose the elect not because they were any better than others. Before God saved them in Christ, the elect were a part of the common lump of sinful humanity. God in mercy chose to take their polluted clay and make vessels of honor and mercy through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Paul uses this same language in Ephesians chapter five when he talks about the church as the bride of Christ. Jesus didn't choose His bride because she was without spot and wrinkle. He chose her to remove the spots and wrinkles and to transform her into a glorious church.

This language "holy and without blemish" refers to our moral condition. We were dead in trespasses and sins. We were enslaved to sinful living. We had been taken captive by Satan to do his will. We were citizens of the dark kingdom. As a part of His saving work, God transforms us. He takes out our heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh with the law of God written upon it. He transforms us from people committed to doing what is right in our own eyes regardless of what God says, into people whose chief aspiration in life is to please God by obeying God. God transforms us into a people who desire to live within the limits of God's revealed will as the only truly good life and the only truly abundant life.

Over time, God progressively strengthens and confirms our faith in Christ. We experience more and more of His saving power. We increasingly die unto sin and live unto righteousness. At the end of this life, God makes our souls perfect in holiness, and we no longer have any struggle with indwelling sin.

God the Father blessed us. God the Father chose us. And finally, God the Father predestined us. The Greek word here translated "predestined" is related to our English word "horizon," which is the boundary between the earth and the sky. The horizon is a big circle that surrounds us wherever we are on this planet. The word "predestine" means that God in eternity past drew around each of us a circle of destiny. And the destiny for the elect is adoption as sons of God.

Adoption refers to a legal transaction. A married couple go into a courtroom and sign some papers. Before signing those papers, a certain child has no legal relationship to them. After signing those papers, that child has become a legal member of that immediate family. The child doesn't at that moment feel any different. Nothing has changed about his physical condition. But this change in legal status is real, and it will affect that child the rest of his life.

That is also what happens when God adopts us. We become legally a child of God by covenant. God gives us His name and puts us under His fatherly discipline. God makes us a citizen of His nation, a member of His household, a part of the family of faith. He adopts us to Himself. We who were far off are brought near.

In addition to being adopted, we are also born again. Adoption refers to our legal status as sons of God. The new birth refers to our heart condition as sons of God. Having a new heart is also a part of our destiny. As our passage said earlier, God chose us to be holy and blameless in Christ. To use the language of Romans

8:29, God predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. This is the destiny of the people of God based on the work of Christ on their behalf.

Now why did God do this? Again, it wasn't because God saw anything good in us. The prophet Ezekiel compared Israel to a child abandoned at birth and hated. God then took this abandoned child whom no one loved and transformed her into His bride. In like manner, God elected and predestined us in love. He did this not because there was anything desirable in us but according to the pure benevolence of His good pleasure.

Our section for today ends with a statement of the ultimate purpose in God's saving us. The section explaining the work of God the Son in our salvation and the section explaining the work of God the Spirit in our salvation all end with this same basic statement. God's ultimate purpose in saving us is His own glory. God took that bit of polluted clay which was you out of the common lump of sinful humanity and molded it into a vessel of honor for the glory of His mercy and compassion. God is so absolutely perfect and great that bringing Him glory is the highest possible purpose there can possibly be. That is why God saved us.

When we hear the gospel, the stress is on God's sincere promise and on our responsibility. God promises that He will not cast out anyone who comes to Christ in faith. Our responsibility is to obey the gospel, to put our trust in Jesus to forgive our sins and to deliver us from the power of sin. It is as if we approach a

door with the words written on it, "whoever will may come" and "no one who comes will I cast out." When we believe and enter the household of faith through that door and then look back on the door which closed behind us, we see something different written on the inside of the door. It says on the inside, "God chose you in Christ from before the foundation of the world." This message is meant for us primarily after we believe. This message of sovereign grace keeps us humble. This message prevents us from boasting. Yes, we obeyed the gospel when others did not. Yes, we entered the door when others stayed without. Yet the reason was not that we were any better, any wiser, any less a slave of sin or any less dead in sin. The reason was that God chose to be merciful to us. The reason was that God chose to put us into a covenant union with Jesus which gave us spiritual life and which enabled us to believe and to come. Salvation is all of grace. Salvation is of the Lord.